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ABSTRACT

To test the hypothesis that a student probably will not attain a high level of education without aspiring to do so but that high aspirations do not guarantee high educational achievement, researchers surveyed 13% high school students in 2 Mississippi counties during their sophomore year in 1966 and again in 1972. Like youth in other parts of the country, the students had high educational aspirations. All aspired to high school completion; over 94%, to some additional education; and over 66%, to college or graduate degrees. Females had lower aspirations than males, whites had lower aspirations than blacks, and rural youth had lower aspirations than city and town youth. The students' actual educational achievement fell below their aspirations. By 1972 88% had completed high school, 54.5% had obtained additional education, and only 14.9% had college degrees. Differences in aspirations and achievements were largest at the lower and higher educational levels. Differences in achievement between males and females were greatest in the high school and vocational education categories, although more females than males had college degrees. Differences in achievement between blacks and whites were largest for the high school diploma and college degree categories. Place of residence had little effect on educational achievement. (SB)

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Educational Aspirations And Achievements Of Rural And Small Town Mississippi Youth

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SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Educational aspirations of rural and small town sophomore high school students in two Mississippi counties in 1966 were found to be quite similar to those of youth studied in other sections of the United States. They aspired to relatively high educational levels; i.e., over 66% aspired to college or graduate degrees. Females had lower educational aspirations than did males, and whites had lower educational aspirations than did blacks. About 60% of the rural youth, but 75% of the city and town youth wanted to obtain a college degree.

Actual educational achievement fell below aspirations for the youth in this study. This is consistent with research being conducted in other parts of the country (Gasson, et al., 1972; Howell, 1978), and our findings on occupational aspirations and attainment (Sollie, et al., 1976) of Mississippi youth. However, educational achievement was measured only four years after a majority of the respondents had graduated from high school, and it still is possible for the aspiration-achievement differences to decrease.

Our findings indicate that educational aspirations play an important role in educational achievement in that higher aspiration levels are a necessary but not sufficient condition for high educational attainment. High educational aspirations are not a guarantee that a student will attain them, but very few students seem to achieve beyond their aspiration level.

This report is a limited study of the educational aspirations and achievements of some Mississippi youth and how these differ by sex, race, and place of residence. Further study is needed to document the educational experiences of Mississippi youth as they grow older. We will attempt to contact these same people in 1979.

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Educational Aspirations And Achievements Of Rural And Small Town Mississippi Youth

Providing some of their members with opportunities to obtain extensive formal education is vital for the functioning of industrialized societies. These societies also must provide rewards sufficient to assure an adequate supply of educated people. Industrialized societies generally offer higher incomes and more prestige to people in occupations requiring extensive education. Such rewards motivate parents to instill in their children the values of formal education.

Children become aware of the work world as they grow older (Osipow, 1973), begin to relate that world to their future plans and become increasingly realistic in matching their abilities and resources to their educational and occupational aspirations (Howell, et al., 1977). Also, many advancing students begin to value the aesthetic or personal satisfaction and growth potential of formal education.

The dual nature of education---preparing people for employment and the personal satisfaction derived from acquiring knowledge---makes it difficult to advise young people how much formal education they should seek. High school counselors can easily explain to students how much formal education they need to qualify for a particular job, but it becomes more difficult to describe the personal satisfaction in reaching a certain educational level.

Other factors that must be considered include the student's aspirations, expectations, abilities, motivation and financial situation. Counseling students effectively involves reducing disparities between these factors. For example, encouraging a student with a C average in high school and very little money to aspire to medical school would be unfair without providing a realistic assessment of the chances of reaching the goal and possible alternatives that may be more realistic. Therefore, it is important that vocational counselors know not only the talents and abilities of students with whom they work but also their educational choices.

We hypothesized that a student likely will not attain a high level of education without aspiring to do so, but that high aspirations do not guarantee high educational achievement. This publication reports the results of a study designed to test the validity of this hypothesis.

Tenth-grade students in Noxubee and Hancock Counties were interviewed in groups in 1966 to determine their educational aspirations. An attempt was made to interview the same students individually six years later to determine their educational achievements. However, only 134 interviews were completed in 1972 because 100 of the initial respondents could not be located with the time and resources available (Table 1). We present the data available on these 134 students with acknowledgement of possible bias due to selective sampling.

Table 1. Number of respondents interviewed in a survey to determine the educational aspirations and achievements of rural and small town youth, by race, sex and place of residence, Noxubee and Hancock Counties, Mississippi, 1969 and 1972.

	Non-Farm	Rural Farm	City or Town	Total
	----------	Number	----------	
Blacks				
Male	3	3	6	12
Female	4	9	6	19
Whites				
Male	16	20	21	57
Female	11	12	20	43
Total	34	44	53	131*

*Three students are omitted from this table because they failed to report their place of residence.

EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS

Students interviewed in 1966 were asked to list the type and level of education they would like to attain. Educational goals ranged from finishing high school to graduate studies (Table 2). More than 66.5% of the respondents aspired to a college or graduate degree. Slightly more than 20% of the students indicated an interest in vocational training and 8.2% desired a junior college education. The remaining 5.2% wanted only to finish high school.

Educational Aspirations by Sex

A larger percentage of male than female students aspired to college or graduate degrees (Table 3). A greater percentage of females wanted vocational training. There were no male-female differences in the percent who aspired to a junior college education. The observation that male sophomore high school students had higher educational aspirations than did female students is consistent with findings from other parts of the country (Sewell and Shah, 1967; William, 1972).

Education Aspirations by Race

Almost 76% of the black sophomore high school students wanted to obtain a college or graduate degree, and all black students wanted education beyond high school (Table 3). White sophomore students desired less education---6.9% did not plan to continue their education beyond high school, and 63.4% wanted to obtain a college or graduate degree. This finding that black sophomore students have higher educational aspirations was not unexpected (Carter, et al., 1972; Coleman, et al., 1966; Gordon, 1972; Porter, 1974, 1976; Hout and Morgan, 1975; Bachman, 1970; DeBord et al., 1977; Kerckoff and Campbell, 1977).

Educational Aspirations by Place of Residence

All rural non-farm students planned to continue their education beyond a high school degree, but 9.1% of the rural farm and 5.7% of the city or town students did not aspire to do so (Table 3). About 32% of the students in each rural category wanted a college degree compared to about 42% of the city or town students. A greater percentage of rural non-farm and rural farm residents desired vocational training than did city or town residents. About 60% of the students in each rural category aspired to a college or graduate degree, compared to 75% of city or town students.

EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS

All students contacted in the follow-up interview in 1972 had planned to finish high school, but 12% had not done so four years after their high school class was graduated (Table 2). All but about 5% of the students planned to continue their education after high school, however, 45.5% had obtained no additional education four years after they got their diplomas. Fewer than one fourth of the sophomore high school students who aspired to a college or graduate degree had actually fulfilled their aspirations. More than one third of the students had aspired to a college degree but only 14.9% had attained this educational level in 1972.[1]

Differences between aspirations and achievements were not large at the junior college and vocational training level (Table 2). Occurrence of the largest discrepencies between aspirations and achievements were at the lower and higher educational levels.

Numbers of students who achieved their educational aspirations were 0, 1, 3, 0, 13 and 0, respectively, for some high school, finished high school, vocational training, junior college, college degree and graduate degree. Only five of the 134 students had attained educational levels higher than their expectations. Underachievers numbered 112 or 83.6% of the sample and were most heavily concentrated in the higher educational aspiration levels.

Educational Achievements by Sex, Race and Residence

Major differences in male and female educational attainments were in the high school and vocational training categories (Table 4). About 7% of the males and 18% of the females had not completed high school by 1972. Only 9.7% of the females but 18.1% of the males had received vocational training.

The difference was small, but more females than males had a college degree by 1972. However, only 30.6% of the females had aspired to a college degree but 41.7% of the males had expressed aspiration for

[1]*Some of the respondents may still have been working on college degrees four years after high school. Some who were not in school in 1972 may eventually resume their education.*

this level of education (Table 3). These findings are consistent with those of other researchers who have found that females are less likely to aspire to a college degree (Sewell and Shah, 1967). However, when females attend college their gender does not affect their chances of graduating (Sewell and Shah, 1967, 1968; Alexander and Eckland, 1974).

Differences in achievement by blacks and whites were largest for the high school diploma and college degree categories. This finding also is consistent with the literature (Duncan, 1967; Jencks et al., 1973; Portes and Wilson, 1976). A college degree had been obtained by 17.8% of the white students, but only 6.1% of the blacks had reached this level by 1972.

Place of residence had little effect on educational attainment and this is consistent with results of a study of Wisconsin youth (Sewell, et al., 1970). The major exception was that only about 6% of the rural non-farm residents received junior college degrees, while about 15% of both rural farm and city or town residents did.

Table 2. Educational aspirations in 1966 and educational achievements in 1972, 134 rural and small town youth, Noxubee and Hancock Counties, Mississippi.

	1966 Aspirations		1972 Achievements	
Education	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Some High School	0	0.0	16	12.0
Finish High School only	7	5.2	61	45.5
Vocational Training (with or without H.S. Degree)*	27	20.1	19	14.2
Junior College**	11	8.2	18	13.4
College Degree	49	36.6	20	14.9
Graduate Degree***	40	29.9	0	0.0
Total	134	100.0	134	100.0

***Includes practical nursing and military training**
****Includes business school**
*****It is not likely that there had been sufficient time for any respondents to receive a graduate degree by 1972.**

Table 3. Educational aspirations of 134 rural and small town youth by sex, race and place of residence, Noxubee and Hancock Counties, Mississippi, 1966.

Educational Aspiration	Sex		Race		Place of Residence*		
	Males	Females	Blacks	Whites	Rural Non-Farm	Rural Farm	City or Town
	Percent						
Finish High School only	2.8	8.1	0.0	6.9	0.0	9.1	5.7
Vocational Training (with or without H.S. degree)	12.5	29.0	18.2	20.8	29.4	25.0	11.3
Junior College	8.3	8.1	6.1	8.9	8.8	6.8	7.5
College Degree	41.7	30.6	24.2	40.6	32.4	31.8	41.5
Graduate Degree	34.7	24.2	51.5	22.8	29.4	27.3	34.0
Totals (%)	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
No	72	62	33	101	34	44	53

***The number of cases for place of residence totals 131 because three of the respondents did not provide this information.**

Table 4. Educational achievements of 134 rural and small town youth by sex, race and place of residence, Noxubee and Hancock Counties, Mississippi, 1972.

Educational Achievement	Sex		Race		Place of Residence[1]		
	Males	Females	Blacks	Whites	Rural Non-Farm	Rural Farm	City or Town
	Percentage						
Some High School	6.9	17.8	15.1	10.9	14.7	11.4	9.4
Finish High School	47.2	43.5	51.5	43.6	50.0	45.5	43.4
Vocational Training (with or without a H.S. Degree)*	18.1	9.7	18 2	12.9	14.7	13.6	15.1
Junior College**	13.9	12.9	9.1	14.8	5.9	15.9	15.1
College Degree	13.9	16.1	6.1	17.8	14.7	13.6	17.0
Graduate Degree***	---	---	---	---	---	---	---
Totals (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
No.	72	62	33	101	34	44	53

[1]Totals to 131 because 3 respondents did not provide this information
*Includes practical nursing and military training
**Includes business school
***It is not likely that there had been sufficient time for any respondents to receive a graduate degree by 1972.

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